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TAGS: PREL CU EZ XG

SUBJECT: CZECHS COMMENTS ON STATE OF PLAY WITHIN EU ON CUBA

REF: A. WOHLERS-OTALLAH E-MAIL DATED 6.4

- 1B. BRUSSELS 845
- 1C. CARNIE-JOBIN WELCH E-MAIL DATED 6.4
- 1D. CARNIE-OTALLAH E-MAIL DATED 6.3
- 1E. CARNIE-DEAN E-MAIL DATED 5.27.08
- 1F. PRAGUE 320
- 1G. OTALLAH-CARNIE E-MAIL DATED 5.23.08
- 1H. PRAGUE 289
- 1I. PRAGUE 277
- 1J. PRAGUE 246

Classified By: POLEC Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: Czech officials, while maintaining their strong commitment to advancing democratic change in Cuba as well as the spotlight on political prisoners and human rights issues on the island, face ever mounting pressure from within the EU to support elimination of the "June Measures." Following the June 3 EU COLAT meeting, the Czechs made substantial comments on the "disappointing" draft document regarding these measures prepared by the Slovene Presidency. The Czechs plan to make their case, yet again, at the June 9 round of discussions in Brussels as to why these measures should not be eliminated. While they have a fall back position of what they would like to see adopted if the rest of the EU supports lifting these measures, the Czechs do not plan to allow this matter to be concluded on June 9 since they will need to consult Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, who will be in the U.S. next week, before accepting any compromises on this document. End Summary.

Czechs Share USG Commitment to Democratic Change, But Making No Headway within EU

12. (SBU) The Czech perspective on how to promote democratic change in Cuba dovetails closely with USG policy on Cuba and the Czechs are actively engaged on a bilateral basis. The Czechs remain skeptical about the "reforms" announced over the last five months by Raul Castro, and the NGO People in Need has prepared a report highlighting serious human rights concerns during this period, which they discussed with NGOs from around Europe gathering in Prague on June 4-6. The Czech efforts to educate other EU member states, however, have not swayed these members to follow the Czech lead. Indeed, as discussions regarding the June Measures and negotiations over the June 10 U.S.-EU summit declaration demonstrate (Refs A - E), there is substantial EU member state resistance to even reference Cuba in the Summit declaration, let alone accept USG suggested language underscoring a shared commitment and reference human rights in Cuba.

Trying to Leverage the Best Deal Possible, if...

¶3. (C) In the eyes of the Czech MFA, the EU's "June Measures," which directly linked EU punitive measures (limits to bilateral high-level government visits, reduction in profile of EU participation at Cuban cultural events, invitations to Cuban dissidents at national day celebrations and a re-evaluation of the EU Common Position) with developments in Cuba regarding political prisoners, still hold true and nothing merits revision. The Czechs, however, are clearly not encouraged by the prospects for maintaining these measures given the prevailing sentiment within the EU, which they feel is stronger and more vocal than it was last year. Czech MFA Cuba desk officer, Jarmila Povejsilova, noted that the Czechs do not think the idea of a "framework" to evaluate the EU-Cuba dialogue every year goes far enough (since there are not benchmarks or caveats attached to this dialogue). If the tide moves against them, the Czechs stated their plan to press for references to contact with the opposition, International Red Cross access to political prisoners, and a requirement that EU high-level visitors to Cuba meet with dissidents and discuss human rights concerns with the regime. In late May, MFA Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy Director Gabriela Dlouha, emphasized that while Cuba has signed the "Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," the Czechs would like to see the EU press for this covenant to be ratified and implemented.

Comment: High-Level Engagement Critical Over Next Few Months

¶4. (C) While the Czechs are a key principled ally on Cuba, and they are particularly active on this topic within the EU, maneuvering and pressure from "influential member states" over the next few days and weeks will be intense. We can expect the Czechs will hold the line for as long as they believe others are with them. If other key EU member states fold, we can anticipate the Czechs will negotiate for the best deal possible in terms of additional caveats or conditions in return for lifting the measures. As the Foreign Minister has been actively engaged on this matter, we can anticipate that this will go right down to the GAERC on June 16 before things are finalized.

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